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Soviet sponsored assassinations — why ridiculous?

PATRICK BUCHANAN

Arkady Schevchenko, ex-aide to Andrei Gromyko, is the highest ranking diplomat ever to defect from the Soviet Union. Following an interview, I asked him if he were aware of any successful Soviet assassination plots lately in the West or the Third World. No, he responded, but they did talk constantly about killing Anwar Sadat.

What brings that little episode to mind is the incredible story last week involving Romanian President Ceausescu and President Mitterand of France.

Here briefly is the story:

Virgil Tanase and Paul Goma were both Romanian exiles and dissidents living and writing in Paris. They first produced a magazine piece searing the Stalinist regime in Bucharest titled, "His Majesty Ceausescu the First, King of the Communists;" the other produced a book of a similar theme, *The Dogs of Death*.

Ceausescu, in the style of his model, J.V. Stalin, ordered the writers liquidated, murdered. The assignment was given to a Romanian spy working under diplomatic cover at the embassy in Paris. Unequal to the task of cold-blooded murder, "Mr. Z" the spy, came in from the cold, defected to the French security police. Together, they concocted a scheme to make it seem "Mr. Z" carried out the contracts on Tanase and Goma, long enough for him to get home to Romania and bring his family out.

First, Mr. Z staged a mock attempt to kill Goma by using a fake fountain pen to squirt poison in his drink at a cocktail party. A French intelli-

gence agent knocked the glass over, so Mr. Z was able to return to Bucharest to say that "unforeseeable circumstances" had prevented his taking out Goma; but he would return to Paris and kill Tanase.

The Romanian KGB enthusiastically assented to Z's plan to hire French thugs to abduct and dispatch Tanase. In reality, the thugs were French security police. Tanase disappeared, a public outcry arose, even President Mitterand, in on the scheme, expressed "grave concern" for the fate of the dissident in the custody of his secret police. Meanwhile, Mr. Z returned to Bucharest, was decorated for the liquidation of Tanase, arranged for the departure of his family, and fled. His mother didn't make it; a Paris newspaper broke the story too soon.

Incredible, but true. In 1982, Soviet client states are putting out murder contracts on dissidents in Western capitals, and the West continues pretty much with detente as usual.

An even more vicious and sinister story came to light this month, to remarkably little comment. The finger of suspicion has been pointed directly at the Bulgarian secret police, that wholly owned subsidiary of the KGB, as the prime mover in the attempted murder of the Polish Pope.

When John Paul II was first shot, I suggested at a news panel that, since the Turkish assassin was supposed to be a fascist hit man, yet had fled into communist Bulgaria and had emerged weeks later unharmed, it would not surprise me to find Moscow's hand in the attempted mur-

der of the Pope. At which the braying began.

Comes now Claire Sterling, foremost journalistic expert on international terror, to confirm in *Reader's Digest* what a rookie cop, viewing the evidence, would at least have suspected.

Mehmet Ali Agca, the 23-year-old killer who shot the Pope, did indeed flee to Bulgaria after an escape from death row in Turkey. He spent 50 days in there, emerging with a fake Turkish passport, a fake exit stamp from Turkey, but a real and validated exit stamp from Bulgaria — suggesting the authorities in that tight little KGB satrapy knew exactly who and what they were sending West. From there, Agca traveled to some of the poshest watering holes in the West, spending \$50,000 without cashing a check, having third parties phone ahead to make reservations in some of Europe's finer hotels.

Yet, even after Sterling's persuasive case, the tendency is to dismiss it all or ignore it. Ridiculous, one prominent liberal writer told me. Why would the Soviets want to kill the Pope? People who would rise to any rumor that the CIA plotted to kill John F. Kennedy, or that J. Edgar Hoover was out to eliminate Martin Luther King Jr. physically will dismiss the evidence or rush to Moscow's defense.

Ridiculous, they say. But why is it ridiculous? If the Soviets could murder the charismatic religious leader who is the father and soul of Solidarity, while affixing blame to a fascist thus from NATO Turkey, why would they not do it? Scruple? And if they would condone a plot to murder the Polish Pope, in whose assassination would they not conspire?